



## Sympathy for the Devil by rycbar5

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Angst, Romance

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy H., OC

**Pairings:** Billy H./OC

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2018-07-22 21:34:14

**Updated:** 2019-08-14 11:07:41

**Packaged:** 2019-12-12 17:07:31

**Rating:** M

**Chapters:** 6

**Words:** 20,419

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Nari Miller had never spoken to Billy Hargrove, despite being his classmate for years. In fact, she doubted he even knew she existed and she would have been perfectly content to keep it that way. Yet, it seemed that fate had other ideas. A prequel story to Stranger Things 2, set in California.

## 1. 1 - LA Woman

A/N: This story takes place before the Hargrove-Mayfield family moves to Hawkins. Billy is a little different in this story, compared to how he is in Stranger Things 2. He's more aloof and not so constantly angry. This isn't an attempt to change his character. The purpose of this story is to explore how and why he becomes like that. It was my impression, while watching his character, that he became worse due to whatever reason they moved to Hawkins. I'm sure the real reason will be explored in the future of the show and won't even be close to the events of this story, but for now I'm gonna have some fun with the blank spots in his character's history.

This is essentially a love story between him and an OFC, but it's not an instant attraction. It's more of a hate turns into love story. Furthermore, Billy's behaviour once in the relationship isn't typical and is quite dark. He will be possessive and controlling and there will be fairly graphic sexual content later on.

The OFC's mother is Korean and her father is of mixed descent. Of course, Billy's behaviour in ST2 suggests he's a racist, so pairing him with a half-Korean girl may seem odd. However, this will play a role towards the end of the story. The OFC's name is Nari Miller and her face-claim is Lee Ji-Eun (IU), when she has her golden-brown hair.

Lastly, I'm Australian and have never been to America. If I make any mistakes, please let me know and I'll fix it up. I decided to set the story in LA - it's never specified where in California Max and Billy are from. Specifically the Santa Monica/Venice Beach area. Feel free to point out to me if you can't imagine Max and Billy being from that particular part of LA though.

---

*Are you a lucky little lady in the City of Light?*

*Or just another lost angel - City of Night.*

- L.A. Woman by the Doors (1971)

---

Nari Miller felt trapped in a corner. Her best friend looking at her with wide, pleading eyes. Rachel Taylor was a naturally pretty girl with a slim figure, short, curly brown hair, sun-kissed skin and almond shaped green eyes.

"Come on, Nari, *please*," Rachel begged. "I don't want to go alone!"

Nari bit her bottom lip, feeling torn. For over a month, Rachel had been crushing on Dean Nelson. As far as Nari was concerned, the guy – and all his friends – were bad news and she'd prefer to keep her distance from them. So far, she'd managed to do just that, but somehow Rachel had been invited by Dean to his party that night and was leaping at the opportunity. The catch was that she wanted Nari to come with her. Part of her felt guilty and didn't want to let her friend down. Another part of her was adamant about not going and continuing to avoid Dean and his friends like the plague.

"Can't you just go on your own?" Nari huffed. "Once you see Dean, you'll forget I'm there anyway."

"I promise I won't!" Rachel tried to convince her. "Besides, his friends are just as attractive as he is... if I finally get somewhere with Dean, you'll have your pick of hot guys to choose from for yourself."

"You're crazy," Nari rolled her eyes. "Sorry, but those guys are all assholes. I don't care how good looking you think they are."

"What about Billy Hargrove?"

"Ugh, no," Nari screwed her nose up in distaste. "He's the *worst* of the lot!"

"Aww, come on. He may be a little rough around the edges, but he is damn *gorgeous* and no one can deny it."

"You've lost it..." Nari muttered under her breath.

It wasn't as though she didn't like parties, but this kind of party didn't appeal to her at all. Yet, the puppy dog eyes Rachel was giving her eventually crumbled her resolve.

"Fine..." she sighed.

Rachel grinned, quickly giving Nari a tight hug in gratitude before moving over to her record player. Before Nari knew it, *Hurts So Good* by John Cougar was playing at top volume. It was tradition now for them to get ready while listening to that song. Rachel flung clothes haphazardly all over her bedroom, looking for the best outfit that would impress Dean. Nari didn't bother altering her own appearance, despite Rachel's protests, but she did help Rachel with her make up. By the time her best friend was ready she looked stunning. Nari knew Dean would have to be an idiot not to appreciate Rachel's beautiful appearance, as much as she didn't like the guy.

Nari looked ridiculously underdressed by comparison in her slightly baggy Rolling Stones shirt, denim shorts and old white Vans. Yet, this wasn't an ordinary party to her and she couldn't have cared less about how she looked. To her, there was no one to impress. She got into Rachel's car and the two began driving through the streets, headed for the party.

Once they arrived, things were in full swing. The music was blaring and the house was full of teens drinking from plastic red cups. Nari lingered a little behind Rachel, already craving some Springsteen or Fleetwood Mac instead of the hard rock music surrounding her. Her friend was quick to spot Dean, moving over to him.

Dean Nelson was a guy of average height and a lean but toned build. His hair was a dark brown that fell to just above his shoulders and his eyes were a striking blue that seemed to cut through your very soul if their attention happened to focus on you. Nari could understand the appeal for Rachel. He was incredibly good looking and something about his blasé attitude seemed to draw women in like a moth to a flame. However, his cocky, over-confident attitude rubbed her the wrong way.

"Hey princess," Dean drawled once he spotted Rachel, his gaze raking over her figure.

Nari rolled her eyes as Rachel giggled coyly, instantly beginning to flirt with Dean. Turning her attention away from the two of them, Nari then made eye contact with the guy standing next to Dean. It was Johnny Slater, who was in the year above the rest of them. He was looking right at her in a way that made her uncomfortable. His

beady brown eyes seemed to be undressing her with his gaze and it made her skin crawl.

Another guy came up to Slater and stole his attention for the moment, giving Nari an opportunity to leave and find a drink. Rachel was well and truly absorbed in Dean by then, so Nari knew she wouldn't be missed and figured she should make the most of being there since she'd been dragged along anyway.

After acquiring a cup of beer, Nari made her way through the house and found a small circle of mostly occupied chairs. Managing to get one that was free, she sat down, recognising the opening riff of AC/DC's *Hells Bells* playing. A guy seated across from her was talking to the rest of the group in the circle and she tuned in, listening to what he was saying.

"We take turns around the circle. Every time you hear 'Hells Bells' it's the next persons turn to drink. You can't stop drinking until the next 'Hells Bells'."

Most people in the circle nodded or murmured their agreement and before long it was the chorus and the first time in the song that Hells Bells was uttered. The guy who had spoken before took the first turn and shortly after, the person next to him followed once the second 'Hells Bells' had been sung. The next person quickly followed and then the fourth time it was uttered, it was Nari's turn.

Eager to feel the effects of the alcohol and have some fun, Nari raised her cup and drank quickly. Unfortunately for her though, that was the last line of the chorus and a short instrumental break followed. She noticed her cup would be empty soon and wordlessly held out her free hand for another drink. She felt someone place a can in her hand and once her cup was empty, she threw it away and lifted the can to her lips. The others in the circle had begun cheering her as the second verse began.

*I'll give you black sensations up and down your spine*

*If you're into evil you're a friend of mine*

*See the white light flashing as I split the night*

***'Cause if good's on the left,***

***Then I'm stickin' to the right***

She almost thought the chorus must be next, but she was wrong. Thankfully she couldn't drink from the can as quickly as she had from the cup.

***I won't take no prisoners, won't spare no lives***

***Nobody's puttin' up a fight***

***I got my bell, I'm gonna take you to hell***

***I'm gonna get you, Satan get you***

***Hells Bells!***

Nari took the final sip from the can when she finally heard the words and her turn was over. More cheers erupted, with the girl next to her handing her another drink and she let out a goofy grin, accepting the new can of beer. Nari already felt pretty lightheaded. She was a complete lightweight and the game had allowed the alcohol to kick in and for her to loosen up and enjoy herself a little.

Yet, with flushed cheeks and a warmth spreading through her body, Nari decided she was done with the game and needed some fresh air. She got up from her chair, swaying a little as she moved through the crowd and headed for the door that led outside. She was almost there when someone bumped into her from behind and she tripped over her own feet. She stumbled forward, her eyes widening as she caught sight of a beautiful girl directly in front of her.

Time seemed to slow down as Nari prepared herself for the impact, ready for her drink to spill all over the poor girl and for the awkward, rambling apologies to fall from her lips. What she wasn't ready for was the tight grip on her wrist, or to look up at the man standing next to the girl. Her eyes widened even further when she realized it was none other than Billy Hargrove. She would have recognized the tall, imposing stature, those dirty blonde curls, his full lips and cold, round blue eyes anywhere. His strong grip steadied her and her drink, stopping her from spilling it all over him and his date.

Nari may have badmouthed him over the years, but in that moment she couldn't help but admire his quick reflexes. She wondered briefly about whether she'd misjudged him all those years, thinking he was an arrogant jerk who only cared about himself. Those light blue eyes stared intently into her own dark brown ones and once again, she was ready to blurt out words – this time ones of gratitude rather than apology – but once again the words died on her tongue as Billy carelessly shoved her in the opposite direction, her drink spilling all over her shirt.

She stood there, frozen in complete and utter shock as the cold beer seeped through the material, chilling the skin underneath. Her brain reeled, trying to catch up with what had just transpired. However, once she did catch up she seethed with anger.

*Pabo ya*, she scolded herself mentally.

She was a downright fool for thinking Billy Hargrove might actually be a decent human being. He hadn't been catching her fall for any reason other than to steer himself clear of her spilled drink. He couldn't have cared less about her and she doubted he could have cared less about his beautiful date.

Swirling around to face him, her hands became clenched into fists by her sides. He looked at her with an expression of boredom, as his date barely tried to stifle her giggles at Nari's predicament. This only made Nari's anger grow, but her focus was solely on Billy, who had looked away by then in disinterest.

"Hey!" She yelled out to him, only angered further when he seemed unperturbed by her outburst. "What the hell is your problem, you jerk!?"

"Watch where you're going next time," he replied nonchalantly, still not even bothering to look at her.

She gaped after him as he began moving through the crowd, his date following him. Nari narrowed her eyes at him and attempted to follow, not willing to let him get away with it.

"Hey!" She yelled out. "**Hey!**"



It was useless though, as he was long gone and she was much shorter, swallowed by the sea of people. Huffing to herself, Nari looked down at her ruined shirt and pouted, cursing the very existence of Billy Hargrove. She weaved back through the crowd until she got to the kitchen. Turning on the faucet, she wet her shirt, trying to avoid any stains. Her temper was flared up as she mentally called Billy every offensive term under the sun – both in English and Korean.

Until that moment, neither of the two had ever acknowledged the others existence. They'd never spoken, despite years of being classmates. She doubted he even knew who she was - not that it would excuse his behavior. It was her first encounter with Billy Hargrove and needless to say, she wasn't at all impressed.

---

**A/N: There wasn't much Billy in this chapter, but any feedback would be greatly appreciated! 'Pabo ya' basically means 'you fool' or 'you idiot' in Korean. The drinking game Nari plays is one I've played, but with 'Thunderstruck'. Since that didn't come out until 1990, I had to find an alternative...but it definitely works better with Thunderstruck.**

## 2. 2 - Play With Fire

A/N: A sincere thank you to those who left a review on the first chapter! It's extremely motivating and encouraging to receive them so I'm very grateful!

I've actually just updated chapter one with a longer, more detailed version. Any returning readers should give it another quick read so that certain aspects of this chapter (and future ones) aren't confusing. I hope you all enjoy the second chapter :)

---

*Don't play with me, 'cause you're playing with fire*

- Play With Fire by the Rolling Stones (1965)

---

"**Michin nom!**" Nari muttered under her breath in Korean, glaring at Billy Hargrove from across the hall.

It was Monday morning and she hadn't forgotten what he did the previous Saturday night at the party. How one person could be so rude was beyond her and she vowed to herself that she'd put him in his place one way or another. For the moment, however, she was content to glare daggers at him from across the school hallway.

He seemed completely at ease, leaning against his locker, his gaze suggestive as Lori Jensen flirted shamelessly with him. *Why* so many women threw themselves at him was beyond Nari. Physical beauty only got you so far and Nari scoffed as she observed Billy's appearance that morning. He wore tight jeans, as he always did, paired with a white button-up shirt.

"Why bother wearing a shirt if you're only going to do up two buttons!?" She exclaimed in annoyance, now glaring at his exposed chest. "Even if you have a nice body, you don't need to flaunt it so shamelessly!"

So wrapped up in her annoyed muttering was Nari that it took her a moment to realize she'd admitted out loud that Billy Hargrove was

attractive.

"**Ani**, *ani*," she spoke rapidly in Korean once again, shaking her head furiously as though the action would somehow delete her previous statement from existence.

"What're you muttering about?"

Nari turned quickly to find Rachel with her childhood friend, Jay, who was leaning against her locker and giving her a look of puzzled amusement. Jay was her closest friend, who she'd known since the age of three. He was tall and slim with shaggy brown hair, an olive skin tone and wide, brown eyes. He watched her in curiosity, his brow furrowing into a frown and his lips settling into a slight pout as he waited for her answer.

"Nothing, nothing," Nari responded, laughing awkwardly and unconvincingly.

Jay narrowed his eyes, clearly not believing her, before his gaze flitted over to where hers had rested only moments ago.

"You were staring at Billy Hargrove?" He asked slowly, his expression quizzical.

"Wait, *what*?" Rachel finally cut in, following Jay's gaze. "So you *are* interested?"

"God, Rach, **no**!" Nari stared at Rachel in disbelief.

However, her friend continued talking as though Nari had never spoken.

"I could probably set something up," she continued, wrapped up in her own little world. "He's more of a one night stand kinda guy though. But I mean, if you're *into* that sort of thing then..."

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Jay muttered under his breath in annoyance.

"Rach!" Nari cut in more loudly.

Rachel stopped her rambling, looking at Nari with wide eyes.

"I don't want to even be in the same room as the guy!" She explained. "He's a grade A asshole!"

"Why were you staring at him then?" Rachel asked with a knowing look.

Nari gave her friend an aggravated look before recounting what had happened at the party. By the time she'd finished she was feeling even more exasperated, due to Rachel's excited grin.

"Oh, you two should definitely hook up!"

"Rach, what are you *talking* about? I can't stand him and I'm pretty confident that the feeling is mutual."

"He's like Dean," Rachel grinned. "All rough on the edges but once you get to know him..."

She let her sentence hang in the air, a dreamy look in her eyes.

"You're deluded," Jay cut in, rolling his eyes and slinging an arm around Nari's shoulder, pulling her into his side. "Besides, Nari can do better than that jackass."

"Hear, hear!" Nari heartily agreed, finally cracking a grin of her own. "Your head is shoved so far up Dean's ass you've lost all rational thought, Rach."

Rachel huffed in annoyance. "Whatever. You'll eventually see I'm right and then you'll be sorry."

---

A few weeks went by and Billy Hargrove was shoved to the back of Nari's mind. She had only seen him briefly in the school hallways and from a distance in class – and she preferred to keep it that way. One night doing a late night shift at Zucky's Deli, where she'd been working as a waitress for a couple of years. It was a Tuesday night and nearing 11pm, so they weren't that busy and she was able to chat with her work friend Eiza.

Eiza was a beautiful 19-year-old who was wasting her youth, working at Zucky's full time. She had a glowing medium-tan skin tone, big, doe-like brown eyes, a tall hourglass figure and long, wavy brown hair that was almost always tied back. She was always vibrant and friendly – perfect for the customer service business and for keeping Nari energetic when they worked together.

There wasn't much to do and Nari stared at the clock, tapping a pencil against the counter. At that moment, Eiza was taking the order of two older guys and Nari's only company was Todd Rundgren's *Hello It's Me*, as it played on the radio. She looked over lazily when she saw the door at the entrance of the deli open but then felt her eyes widen when she saw that it was Billy Hargrove.

He sat himself in one of the booths and she sent a quick glance Eiza's way, hoping she'd serve him. However, it looked like Eiza wasn't finished taking the other order and technically he was in a booth she was supposed to cover. Sighing, Nari trudged over to his booth with great reluctance, menu in hand. He looked up at her when she approached, his expression unreadable. She stared at him for a moment, feeling awkward and as though this situation didn't warrant her usual customer greeting.

"You gonna give me the menu, or are you just gonna stand there?"

His haughty tone snapped her out of it. She noticed that his brow was quirked in question and his expression showed that he was clearly irked.

"Uh, yeah," she replied clumsily. "Here..."

She handed him the menu unceremoniously and he gave her an odd look, studying her for a moment. She turned on her heel, not wanting to spend another minute near his insufferable ass. As she walked away, leaving him to choose what he wanted from the menu, Nari realized something. The way he'd regarded her... he had looked at her like it was their first meeting. The son of a bitch didn't even remember her!

Oh that was just rich! Typical, considering he had a new girl just about every day. She doubted he remembered all of them so why

would he remember her? Yet, Nari still felt insulted and all her anger regarding his treatment of her at Dean's party resurfaced. She stood behind the counter, glaring daggers at Billy and internally cursing his very existence.

"Damn," Eiza laughed, noticing Nari's sour expression when she eventually approached her. "Bad customer?"

"Oh you have no idea," Nari replied.

"Shame. He's pretty cute."

"Oh god, not you too!" Nari groaned.

"What do you mean?"

"We go to school together. He's the biggest shithead to ever walk the earth, but girls keep flinging themselves at him."

Eiza just laughed. "Well it looks like that 'shithead' is ready to order. Good luck."

Nari pouted in annoyance and begrudgingly went back over to his booth. She was sickeningly sweet as she took his order, pushing her contempt for him to the back of her mind for the moment, but the pressure she used when writing down his order was almost enough to break her pencil in half. He sat lazily against the vinyl-upholstered seat and Nari noticed how tense he was, clearly already pissed off about something before coming to Zucky's. She couldn't have cared less though. She just wanted the night to be over and to be serving her usual customers. She'd even take the more annoying kind – anyone but *him*.

The rest of her exchanges with him in the Deli were minimal, as she only spoke to him when necessary. He didn't seem all that bothered by her less than friendly demeanor. In fact, he barely seemed to pay her any mind, too caught up over whatever he was internally seething over as he smoked cigarette after cigarette. Nari busied herself with meaningless tasks, waiting for her shift to be over and pointedly ignoring him.

"Hon, you're done for the night."

Nari turned to see Gina, an older woman who was taking over from her and Eiza, giving her a warm smile.

"Thanks, Gina," Nari smiled back tiredly.

She walked out the back, leaving Eiza who was chatting enthusiastically to Gina. Nari just wanted to go home. She got changed quickly and headed out the back door, ready to walk home. However, she saw that Billy was walking ahead of her on the sidewalk, clearly having finished his meal. He was nearly at his car and Nari could have let it go – that certainly would have been the smart thing to do– but her anger was still bubbling up inside of her and she was determined to finally give him a piece of her mind.

"Hey!" She called out indignantly.

This time he actually stopped and turned to look at her. He was clearly less than amused, but she was beyond caring.

"You owe me an apology," she told him irately.

There was a moment of silence between them, Billy simply stared at her, his cigarette sitting between his lips and leaving a haze of smoke to swirl in front of him.

"For what, exactly?" He asked lowly, irritation dripping from every word.

"First you handle me like a... a sack of potatoes! Shoving me around, drenching me in beer at that douchebag Dean's party. Then tonight, you don't even recognise me! You're the most insufferable kind of pretentious dickhead! I don't know who you think you are but..."

Her words trailed off and her eyes widened as Billy quickly closed the distance between them, getting right up in her face and grabbing hold of her forearm in a vicelike grip. His imposing figure invaded her personal space, successfully intimidating and quietening her. His 5'8" height seemed to tower over her shorter 5'1" frame, his blue eyes were cold as ice and his strong cologne invaded all of her senses. She suddenly felt as small as an insect, the brewing fury in his eyes leaving her truly scared of him for the first time. His tight hold on

her arm was enough already to intimidate her, but she also sensed something dark and threatening emanating from him.

"I don't give a shit who you are."

His voice sent chills down her spine. His voice was low and almost deceptively calm, but with an undertone of warning that she didn't want to challenge.

"If you know what's good for you," he continued in that quiet, dangerous tone. "You'll stay out of my way."

Silence fell over the two of them, Nari unable to speak and Billy trapping her in his icy gaze. He watched her for a moment longer, almost as though he was searching her eyes for any sign of further insolence from her. When he found none, he finally leant back and away from her, dropping her arm from his grip roughly. He was no longer looking at her and turned back around, once again heading towards his Camaro. He didn't look at her again; he simply got in his car and sped off, Metallica blaring from the speakers as he did.

Nari watched him in stunned silence until the blue Camaro was out of sight and earshot. She let out a shaky sigh, anger and annoyance still simmering inside her. Now, though, there was something else accompanying those emotions. A touch of fear. Rachel was wrong when she said Billy and Dean were the same. Dean may have been a cocky, arrogant jerk, but Billy was something much worse. He had a burning rage deep inside him and as annoyed as Nari was with his behaviour, she didn't want to provoke it any further than she already had.

---

**A/N: Michin nom means 'crazy bastard' in Korean, while 'ani' is an informal way of saying 'no'.**

**Zucky's was a real restaurant and deli in Santa Monica. I've done a fair bit of research, so hopefully the way I write it will be believable, but my version is still a fictionalised version. It was open 24 hours and from what I can tell was pretty popular and locally famous.**



### 3. 3 - Shout at the Devil

A/N: First of all I want to apologise for taking so long to update. Basically, my laptop died on me and it works out that it's better for me to just buy a new one rather than have the old one repaired. However, having no laptop while I've been saving for a new one has made my university studies a lot harder and more time consuming than usual. So between that and work, I haven't had much free time. I'll be able to buy my new laptop on the 7th of August and since it's winter break here, I had some time to do this chapter. Since I get my new laptop next week, I'm aiming to update once a week. Towards the end of semester that may become less frequent, but hopefully no more than two weeks between updates. I want to thank everyone that has reviewed this story, as it means the world to me to hear your feedback and that people are already enjoying this story. Thank you also to everyone who has favourited/followed. I hope this chapter is worth the wait!

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE:** I made a change to one of my original characters. Every time I read back on my writing, I kept misreading Eli as El, so I changed his name to avoid any confusion and I've amended the earlier chapters. Also, I actually always had Nari as a surfer from the moment I created her, so I haven't added that in just because of ST3. I actually wouldn't have picked Billy as a surfer, but I've added that in now that ST3 has come out and we've learned that about him. Just so you know, Nari is also a skater and that will of course play a role later with Max. I always saw Max as more likely to be a surfer than Billy, due to the Endless Summer poster in her room, so that might come into play later too.

---

*He'll be the risk in the kiss*

*Might be anger on your lips*

*Might run scared for the door*

*But in the seasons of wither*

*We'll stand and deliver*

*Be strong and laugh and*

*Shout at the Devil*

**- Shout at the Devil by Mötley Crüe (1983)**

---

The sky was a vibrant mix of colours as the sun began to peak out on the horizon. The early morning air had a slight chill to it, but Nari was warm in her wetsuit as she sat on her surfboard, waiting for a wave good enough to catch. The swell had been disappointing all morning, but she and Jay spent the time chatting idly, not minding as long as they weren't at school.

"You know, he keeps staring at you..." Jay suddenly changed the topic of their conversation, gesturing with a smirk behind her.

Nari turned her head and looked over her shoulder to find a group of guys she knew all too well, sitting on their surfboards much like she and Jay were. They were a considerable distance away but she still clearly saw when the one she least wanted to see turned his head to look right back at her, as though sensing her gaze. They stared at one another for a moment and somewhere in the back of her mind, it registered to Nari that there was at last recognition in his gaze. He seemed to seize her up in that moment, though whatever he was thinking was a mystery to her and she quickly tore her gaze away, crinkling her nose in contempt as she regarded Jay.

"God, it's like he's following me," she complained. "This morning is already shitty enough..."

"Come on, he's not that bad," Jay reasoned, looking slightly confused. "He's better than the rest of them."

"Jay..." Nari looked at him in bewilderment. "It's Billy Hargrove... it doesn't get much worse than him. I already pissed him off, I just want to avoid him until he forgets I exist again."

"Woah, Billy?" Jay looked behind her at the group of guys before bringing his attention back to her. "I meant Henley. What'd you do to

piss off Hargrove?"

"Vance?" Nari questioned, looking behind her once again. "You meant *Vance*?"

The one in question, Vance Henley, was towards the back of the group, his head now turned down towards the water with his long blonde hair covering his face. Jay was right about one thing, he was certainly better than the other guys Billy and Dean were friends with. He had a constant smile on his face and was always friendly, yet he was also a complete goofball.

"Yeah, he was staring at you," Jay pulled her attention back to him. "You didn't answer my question."

Nari smiled sheepishly. "He came into Zucky's and I might have yelled at him about what happened at Dean's party..."

"Nari..." Jay sighed. "Please try not to get on his bad side, you know what he's like when people piss him off and I wouldn't assume you're safe just 'cause you're a girl."

"I know, I know," she assured him. "I'll stay out of his way, I promise."

Jay nodded solemnly and shortly after they gave up on the surf, returning to the shore in time to get ready for school.

---

"So I was thinking something like this," Rachel pointed to a pink top in a magazine she had in front of her. "But I can't find the shade anywhere. Think you can make something for me?"

"Sure," Nari nodded with a smile, already mentally working on it.

"You're the best!" Rachel beamed, flinging her arms over Nari and engulfing her in a tight hug.

Jay rolled his eyes, bored with the two. Rachel's eyes wandered until she spotted Dean outside the cafeteria and suddenly she was standing.

"I'll see you guys later," she winked at Nari, already moving towards

him.

Nari wasn't sure what exactly Rachel and Dean were to each other, but whatever it was, he hadn't seemed to grow bored of her yet and Nari was glad for that, if only for her best friend's sake. Some of Jay's other friends came over to their table, just as Nari started to write down some notes for Rachel's request and she smiled at the only girl among them, Jodi Knox.

"Hey Jodes," she greeted, not looking up from her notebook.

"Hey, whatcha doin'?"

Jodi sat down beside her, peering over at her notebook. She was a tall girl with mahogany skin and dark, wild curls. Her brown eyes were an almond shape and her lips were full and pouty.

"Rach wants me to make a new lipstick colour for her," Nari replied, writing down the ingredients she would need.

Jodi hummed in acknowledgement, knowing Nari's talent with makeup.

"Our drummer quit," Jodi sighed, filling Nari in on her band with Jay.

Jay played bass, while Jodi supplied the lead guitar and vocals. Their rhythm guitarist had bailed a while back, but without a drummer they couldn't do anything.

"Jay didn't tell me that," Nari frowned and Jodi shrugged.

"We'll work something out."

---

Nari tapped her pencil against the wooden desk, her head resting in her hand as she tried to stay awake. Mrs Baudelaire's enthusiastic speech about the symbolism of Oedipus plucking out his own eyes was putting the majority of the class to sleep. At the desk to her right, Jay sat, his leg bouncing up and down in impatience as he stared at the clock with determination, as though his sheer willpower alone could make the time go faster. One row ahead and a few desks to the left, she spotted Lori Jensen glancing flirtatiously in Billy's direction,

before scowling when she failed to get his attention. Nari couldn't help but shake her head with a wry smile, wondering what made girls think they were special enough to be able to gain his attention for more than a few minutes.

Towards the end of the class, Baudelaire began talking about an upcoming assignment and the class let out a collective groan when she explained that they would be partnering up for it. Nari and Jay glanced at one another simultaneously, both hoping that they'd be able to choose their partners. However, all their hopes were crushed when Baudelaire began reading out the pre-arranged partners from a list. Nari slumped in her chair, returning her attention to her English teacher.

"Hargrove and Miller," Baudelaire droned out eventually, before moving on.

Nari froze in her seat for a moment before fervently shaking her head. She turned back to Jay in the hopes that she had misheard or imagined it, but he was looking right back at her with wide eyes.

"Well, shit," she murmured to him. "So much for staying out of his way..."

She decided to hang back when class ended, despite how eager she'd been for it to finish, gesturing for Jay to leave ahead of her. Once the classroom was empty, she made her way up to the teacher's desk at the front of the room. Baudelaire was gathering her paperwork and looked up when she realised Nari wanted to speak with her.

"Mrs. Baudelaire, I wanted to talk to you about the group assignment..."

Her English teacher put down the stack of paper, leaning against the desk and giving Nari her full attention.

"It's just..." Nari continued, uncertain. "I wondered if maybe I could change partners?"

"You know that wouldn't be fair to the other students, Miss Miller."

"I understand, it's just that Har--," she cut herself off. "*Billy* and I don't

really get along and I think it'd be better if we stayed away from each other."

"You're a good student, Miller," Baudelaire told her. "If anyone in this class can keep him in line, it's you. You'll be graded on how you work together, so I suggest you find a way to get along. Good luck."

With that said, Baudelaire went back to gathering her things from her desk. Sighing in defeat, Nari readjusted her bag against her shoulder and sullenly walked out of the classroom.

"Trying to get rid of me already?" A voice behind her spoke, causing her to jump slightly.

Turning back around, she saw Billy leaning against the wall in the hallway, next to the classroom door. He looked mostly bored, but there was a hint of amusement in his eyes.

"I doubt it's an ideal situation for you either," she rolled her eyes.

"You're the one getting your panties in a twist over spilt beer," he shrugged, moving away from the wall and walking towards her.

"It's not just that!" She told him through gritted teeth. "You're just an asshole in general, so yeah, I'm not exactly thrilled at the prospect at doing an assignment with you."

"You don't even know me," he retorted.

She noted that he was much calmer than he had been at Zucky's and decided to test the waters.

"I know enough," she told him pointedly. "You're nothing but a bully, taking whatever chance you can get to pick on people who can't fight back, all to feed your ego and vent out your frustrations, rather than deal with whatever issues you have at home."

All traces of amusement left his eyes and Nari suddenly felt cold and worried that she had pushed too far. She had only been assuming that his behaviour stemmed from his home life, but it seemed she had hit a little too close to home.

"Look," she sighed. "If we're stuck together let's just try to get it over and done with as quickly as possible. Then we can go back to ignoring each other, sound good?"

"No, sweetheart" he said, his voice dripping with sardonicism as he stepped closer to her, intimidating her with his height. "Here's what's going to happen. You're going to muzzle that barking mouth of yours because you don't order me around. Do you understand? Or are we going to have a problem?"

Nari was seething internally; however, the way he was capable of switching so quickly from easy going and amused to cold and calculating once again caused her to feel frozen and she found herself simply nodding obediently.

"We'll meet up on Monday after class," he told her, seeming satisfied for the time being.

Nari watched as he walked down the hall, away from her as she already began berating herself. Part of her was annoyed at herself for backing down so easily, however a bigger part was reminded of Jay's words that morning in the surf and how true she knew them to be. She needed to control her temper around Billy. He'd warned her twice now and she didn't think she really wanted to find out what would happen if she tested him a third time.

---

Sunday night at Zucky's was a lot quieter than usual, leaving Nari and Eiza bored out of their minds, still with hours left of their shift to go. Eiza sat up on the counter, a textbook and a notebook spread out beside her as she chewed on a pencil.

"I don't get it," Nari said to her. "You're Mexican... why are you learning Spanish?"

"I grew up in foster care," Eiza shrugged and Nari could see she was uncomfortable talking about it. "I want to relearn, because it's my heritage, y'know?"

"Yeah, I get it," Nari smiled warmly at her.

Eiza had always been a little strange at times to her, but Nari figured that being brought up like that could make people turn out a lot worse than Eiza had. She busied herself by stocking up the napkins, leaving Eiza to her work and then looked up when the door to the deli opened, immediately wishing she hadn't.

"Nari!" Rachel beamed, immediately making her way over to her.

It wasn't her best friend that had been unwelcome, but rather the people she'd brought in with her. Dean had walked in with his arm around Rachel's waist and a cigarette between his lips. Billy wasn't far behind, his attention entirely focused on the busty blonde next to him. Finally, Vance was at the back of the group, that goofy grin lighting up his features as he surveyed the deli, before his gaze met with Nari's, causing his smile to grow. Well, Vance at least wasn't so bad in her opinion.

"Slow night, huh?" Rachel asked her, bringing her attention back to her best friend.

"Yeah," Nari sighed. "You didn't have to make it worse."

She gestured to the group Rachel had brought with her with a playful smile.

"Come on," Rachel laughed. "Be happy for me. Dean's not that bad when you get to know him."

"Well, you've definitely kept his attention longer than any other girl, although he'd be an idiot not to see how amazing you are."

Rachel smiled coyly and Nari came around to the other side of the counter, leading Rachel over to the table where the others had already sat down. As Rachel slid in beside Dean, him immediately slinging his arm across her shoulders, Nari noticed Billy looking around the deli, recognition in his eyes. It was when his gaze eventually found Nari that realisation seemed to dawn on him and his expression quickly settled back into one of disinterest.

"The food here is shit," he said to Rachel. "Couldn't you think of somewhere better to go?"



Before Nari could snap a retort back at him, Dean cut in.

"Come on man, it's the only place around here that's open this late."

Billy's busty blonde quickly distracted him again and Nari rolled her eyes, taking everyone's orders. Throughout the entire exchange, she could feel Vance's eyes on her and Jay's words from a few days prior popped back into her mind.

*He keeps staring at you...*

Vance grinned up at her when she took his order, his eyes shining genuinely and kindly. His happiness was contagious and Nari couldn't help but smile back at him. When she turned to leave the table and take their order to the kitchen, she felt someone following her. Turning around, she saw that it was Vance.

"What's up, Van?" She asked him kindly.

"I wanted to talk to you, actually."

Nari instantly felt uncomfortable. She liked Vance a lot more than his friends, but after what Jay had said and the way he'd been watching her only moments earlier, she felt like she wasn't prepared for what he was about to say.

"Shoot," she said, trying to seem casual and not like a bundle of nerves.

"Acker's looking for a drummer, right?" He asked her, still smiling.

"Huh?" She blurted out dumbly. "Jay? Oh... yeah he is, actually. Do you play?"

"Yeah," he grinned. "Do you think he'd give me a shot?"

Nari stared at him in bewilderment for a moment. He'd probably been looking over at them in the surf and staring at her just now for this very reason and she'd read into it and assumed things that now made her feel like an idiot. Quickly composing herself, she smiled genuinely at Vance, who had started to look a little disheartened at her silence.

"I think he would, Van," she told him. "If you're any good."

She gave him a teasing grin and all doubt left him as he beamed widely at her again. If Rachel and Dean were going to continue whatever was happening between them, Nari knew she would have to get used to his friends. With that being the case, Vance would at least make that a lot more tolerable. As he went back to his table after she promised to talk to Jay for him, Nari looked back over at Billy and wondered how she'd survive being partnered to him for their English assignment. It seemed as though fate was determined to bring the two together, as much as they both evidently loathed the idea. Nari would just have to ride it out and try not to make things worse than they already were between the two of them. She was already dreading the next day when she'd have to spend time alone with him, working on their assignment.

---

**A/N: I promise that all of my OC's have an important role to play in Billy and Nari's story and relationship. So what might seem like filler right now, is setting all of that up for the future.**

**Feedback is always appreciated!**

## 4. 4 - Cry In Shame

A/N: I'm posting this chapter early, as I won't have time to upload next week and I had a day off today to be able to write it. So there won't be an update next week, but rather the following one. Enjoy!

---

*Pickin' up the pieces up off the floor  
How was I to know there was gonna be a war?  
Words of sorrow, words of spite  
Ringin' in my head right through the night  
Don't you know it's a cryin' shame  
When you've got yourself to blame*

**- Cry in Shame by Johnny Diesel and the Injectors (1989)**

---

Nari tried to concentrate on their presentation about *Oedipus*, but it was hard to focus when Billy was sitting across from her, completely disinterested. She had bit her tongue when they'd sat down in the school library and he put his feet up on the desk, lounging back in his chair. She had let it go when he played with his zippo instead of giving any contribution towards their assignment. Nari tried very hard to keep her temper in check, because she knew that the sooner she got the assignment finished, the sooner she could keep a nice distance from him. Sighing, she pushed the page of notes over to his side of the desk, being careful to avoid touching his boots in the process. She screwed up her nose in annoyance, wondering how one person could be so inconsiderate.

"I've come up with a few ideas," she told him, motioning to the page of notes.

He picked it up lazily, giving it a brief lookover, before scrunching it up into a ball and throwing it up into the air before catching it again.

"No," was all he said in response, continuing to throw the paper ball and catch it repeatedly.

"What is your problem?" She seethed.

"I'm not going to spend ten minutes talking about..." he paused to smooth out the paper, before pointing to one of her notes. "Incest."

"Did you even read the play?" She asked with a roll of her eyes.

A shrug was his only response, only causing her limited amount of patience to become non-existent.

"Listen, Hargrove, I get that you don't want to be here so I don't really know why you bothered. I don't know what I expected, but if you're gonna be a useless jackass, just fuck off and let me do it on my own."

She jumped when he slammed his hand down on the table and had to admit that she was a little impressed by how quickly he moved from his lazy position to one where his feet were on the ground and he was leaning over the table, glaring at her.

"You just can't help running your mouth, can you?" He asked, back to being cold and calculating.

"Whatever, Hargrove," she huffed. "I'm sick of doing this dance with you. You're the one who is all talk and no action. I'm not going to let you intimidate me anymore. So one last time, either contribute or fuck off."

She moved her attention back down to her notes, trying to put her attention back onto *Oedipus*. She tried so hard to focus on the play that she didn't pay it any mind when he got out of his chair until the shock of being hoisted out of her own seat and pushed against the nearest shelf of books broke her from her thoughts.

"What the hell?" She called out.

Billy was holding her against the shelf in a vice like grip and she saw the anger in his blue eyes, wild like a storm. She could see conflict in them too, like he was trying to control his temper. Glancing around, she saw that no one was close enough to really pay them much mind, only making her shiver with nerves at what his next action might be. Looking back at him, Nari tried not to let her trepidation show.

"You got a death wish?" He asked her slowly, his voice deceptively calm. "I've never laid a finger on a girl, but you seem pretty

determined to make that change."

His grip on her tightened painfully and she winced, but he was clearly beyond the point of caring. His body seemed to cage her own, so that she couldn't focus on anything but him, leaving her feeling trapped and helpless. All that she could see, hear, smell and feel was him and it was suffocating.

"You like pushing me, huh?" He continued to taunt her. "I can think of a few -"

"What is going on here?" A shrill voice cut through the tension in the air, much to Nari's relief.

Looking to her left, she saw the librarian, Miss Colson, giving them both a stern look. Billy backed up, thankfully letting her go in the process and she breathed a little easier.

"Detention, both of you," Colson didn't miss a beat.

"But—" Nari tried to argue that she wasn't the one in the wrong.

"I don't want to hear it, Miss Miller," Colson cut her off. "Yelling in my library won't be tolerated. Detention, that's final."

Hearing footsteps behind her, Nari saw Billy already storming out of the library, his shoulders tense and his fists clenched. She sighed, wondering if they'd ever have a normal interaction where they weren't at each other's throats.

---

Later that afternoon, Nari walked into Zucky's for another shift, smiling when she saw Eiza already behind the counter. It was busy and as soon as she had tied her apron around her waist she was being thrust into work. There were countless tables to serve and she had to keep a smile plastered to her face for hours, making the satisfaction of their customers her top priority. It seemed never ending until later in the night, well past dinnertime when it finally became quiet again. Nari allowed herself a short rest, leaning against the counter as Eiza finished wiping down one of her own tables.

"You look more tired than usual," her colleague observed without

looking up from her task. "Rough day at school?"

"You have no idea," Nari huffed, rubbing her arm where Billy had held it tightly earlier that afternoon.

Eiza finished wiping down the table and turned to Nari, observing her for a moment.

"That cute boy giving you trouble?"

Nari couldn't help but smile wryly at Eiza's insight. She had always had a knack for reading people, to a point where her perception was generally scarily accurate. Nari simply shrugged, confirming her colleague's words.

"You riled him up, didn't you?" Eiza smiled knowingly.

"Maybe," Nari reluctantly admitted. "But I wouldn't have gotten pissed off if he was capable of not being an asshole for five minutes!"

"It's a two way street, Nari. You can't expect him to keep his temper in check if you don't do the same."

"I've tried to work with him on this stupid assignment, but he has zero interest. How am I supposed to keep my cool when he's always acting like a jerk? It's not my fault his temper changes like the flip of a switch!"

"Has he always been hot headed?" Eiza questioned.

"Ever since I can remember... I think it comes from his home life."

"Well everyone deals with things in different ways," Eiza reasoned. "You of all people should know how people can lash out when they're struggling to deal with stuff."

Nari considered her friend's words, not appreciating the reminder of the root of her own anger issues.

"Whatever his issues are, it doesn't give him an excuse to be an asshole," Nari grumbled.

"No," Eiza agreed. "I'm just saying you don't have to provoke him. Maybe try to be a little more understanding and patient. You might find that it makes all the difference. People like that... sometimes all it takes is one person to help them through it."

"I'm not about to become buddies with Hargrove..."

Eiza rolled her eyes. "Just... be a bit more patient, okay? Try having at least one conversation with him that doesn't end in an argument. You might be surprised."

Nari considered it for a moment and while she knew that her behaviour towards Billy was somewhat justified, Eiza had a point. The last two times she'd interacted with him, her impatience had caused her irritation to flare, in turn setting off his own temper. While, she couldn't excuse his behaviour, she also couldn't deny that she had pushed him incessantly and was as much to blame for their arguments as he was.

"Fine..." she acquiesced.

"I'm sure if you don't let him rile you up, this project will be a lot easier for both of you."

Eiza pat her arm reassuringly before disappearing out the back to rinse out the cloth she'd been using to wipe down her tables. Nari contemplated on her words in silence, knowing she should take Eiza's advice. She figured it was worth a shot, since it couldn't get much worse than it already was.

---

Nari hadn't expected Billy to bother showing up for detention, so she was surprised to find him already in the room when she showed up. Sure enough, he looked like he'd rather be anywhere else, but he was there anyway. He continued to leave her perplexed and she stood in the doorway for what was probably longer than necessary.

"You don't have to wait for an invitation, Miss Miller," the teacher overseeing their detention drawled from his desk.

Nari had never really liked Mr Brooks and resisted the urge to roll

her eyes as she made her way to one of the vacant desks.

It wasn't hard to find an empty seat, as she and Billy were the only ones there. When she was seated she stared expectantly at Brooks, expecting some sort of indication as to how exactly they'd be spending the two torturous hours they had to be there. However, Brooks didn't waste much time before getting up from his desk and moving towards the door.

"I'll be back in two hours," he told them. "I'll be locking the door behind me, so behave yourselves and take some time to reflect on the actions that got you here."

With that said, he walked out of the room, the click of the lock falling into place following his departure.

*Lazy bastard*, Nari thought to herself.

It wasn't long before an awkward silence fell upon the room and she sneaked a glance at Billy. He shifted slightly, as though he could sense her gaze on him but didn't say anything, instead choosing to pointedly ignore her. Her eyes widened and she bit back a gasp when she noticed a bruise on his cheek. It wasn't exactly a rare sight to see Billy Hargrove bruised, and like most other people she had always assumed he'd gotten into a fight, considering how easy it was to make his temper flare up. Yet, after her conversation with Eiza, she found herself suddenly wondering if it was more than it seemed. Recalling that conversation, Nari figured maybe two hours locked in a room alone together might be the best opportunity for a fresh start. Pushing aside her pride, she decided to try and have at least one conversation with him that didn't end in an argument. After all, maybe she had been overreacting about what happened at Dean's party. She had always made assumptions about him and in that moment she couldn't really pinpoint as to why that was.

"Look, Billy—"

"Jesus Christ, don't you ever shut up?"

Right, that was why.



"Do you have to constantly be a complete asshole?" She found herself snapping back at him.

So much for that fresh start...

"You're the one who landed us in detention," he retorted. "This isn't exactly how I would've chosen to spend my afternoon."

Taking a deep breath, Nari tried to focus on Eiza's advice rather than how much she wanted to slap that smartass smirk off Billy's face. She cooled her temper and decided to try again.

"Okay, well let's bail then," she suggested in a much calmer tone, reaching up into her hair and removing a bobby pin. "I have a talent for picking locks."

He turned to face her, giving her a condescending look.

"Yeah, and get us another couple of detentions for your trouble? Real bright idea, genius."

"Never picked you as a stickler for the rules, Hargrove."

"Yeah, and I never thought you'd be the one suggesting we break them."

"To be fair, you don't really know anything about me," she pointed out. "Come on, Brooks won't come back until our time's up. As long as we're back by then, he'll never know."

She waved the bobby pin in front of him, attempting to entice him into agreeing. So far so good, they hadn't gotten into a full blown argument and Nari wanted to prove to herself that she could at least get along with him, if only for the sake of her grades.

"Anything's better than being locked in this room," he finally agreed.

Grinning, Nari got up from her seat and moved over to the door. It didn't take too long before the lock clicked and she was able to open the door.

"Impressive," Billy complimented, throwing her off for a moment.

Eventually she just smiled and the two of them stepped out into the hallway, looking around to make sure Brooks wasn't in sight.

"Well, you learn a few tricks growing up with a Korean mom," she shrugged as they began walking down the hall.

"Must be so hard," he said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Hmm, and for the record you landed *yourself* in detention," she reminded him, subconsciously rubbing her arm.

He grew quiet for a moment and while she wasn't expecting an apology, his silence at least indicated that he regretted letting his temper get the better of him.

"If you'd just kept your mouth shut," he eventually said. "I could've been out with a girl right now"

"You wound me," she rolled her eyes. "I'm not good enough?"

He fell silent again and she stopped walking to turn and look at him. He was eyeing her up and down and when his eyes slowly trailed up her figure she felt uncomfortable as goosebumps prickled her skin and she wasn't entirely sure how she felt about the look in his eyes. When his gaze met hers it turned mischievous and his lips turned up in a roughish smile.

"Maybe if you were gagged, I'd consider it."

She almost choked from the audacity he had, stunned into silence as she stared at him in shock.

"Wow, I finally got you to keep quiet," he laughed.

"You pig," she scoffed, turning back around and continuing down the hallway.

A soft laugh was his only response and she brushed it off. She could have snapped at him, like every other time he'd said something that rubbed her the wrong way, but Nari was intrigued to see what would happen if she kept her cool. He was only teasing her, and while it wasn't necessarily amusing to her, there was no harm done. Anything

was better than his painful grip and the wild look in his eyes when they'd been in the library. She came to a stop outside the school's gymnasium and an idea popped into her head. She knew he played for the Vikings, having sat in those bleachers and seen him play a couple of times. Nari turned to face him once again and he looked at her with curiosity. She smiled at him, having worked out a way to pass the time.

"How long have you played basketball?" She asked him.

"Since I was a kid," he replied, clearly confused as to where this was going.

"Should we play a game?" She suggested.

His only response was to give her an incredulous look.

"Can you think of a better way to pass the time?" She asked him with a raised eyebrow.

After a moment, he shrugged, moving past her and into the gymnasium. He grabbed a ball and gave her another once over after she had followed him inside.

"Do you even know how to play?" He asked.

"Sort of," she shrugged.

He didn't miss a beat and she quickly ducked when he threw the ball her way.

"You're generally supposed to, you know, *catch* the ball," he deadpanned.

"Ha-ha, smartass," she rolled her eyes, moving to pick up the ball. "A bit of warning would've been nice."

She tried to return the favour, throwing the ball back to him without notice, but his reflexes were too quick and he easily caught the ball, smirking at her from across the court. They began to play a fairly relaxed game and Nari became frustrated when it was clear that he was easily beating her by a long shot. He wasn't even trying to hide

his amusement and while it was a nice change to see a smile on his face, her competitive streak only made her more determined to gain the upper hand and wipe the stupid smirk from his face. He moved effortlessly across the court and deep down Nari knew she could never keep up, yet it didn't deter her.

"Give it up, Miller," he taunted, easily keeping out of her grasp as he dribbled the ball lazily. "You need to learn to admit defeat."

Glaring at him, she only became more stubborn from his teasing. Moving quickly across the court, she attempted to steal the ball from him, but his smirk simply grew as he easily lifted it above her and shot it somewhere behind her. Turning, she saw it go smoothly through the hoop, giving him yet another point against her. Her body slumped in defeat and she almost jumped when she felt a hand settle on her shoulder.

"Don't be too hard on yourself," he teased, his voice right by her ear. "You never had a chance."

"You jerk!" She complained, turning back around to face him. "I'll show you—"

"Time's up," he interrupted her, gesturing to the clock on the wall.

Looking up, she noticed that he was right. They needed to return to that classroom before Brooks came back. She narrowed her eyes, feeling disappointed that Billy had managed to completely kick her ass at the game.

"This isn't over, Hargrove," she promised him as they began to head out of the gymnasium.

"I'll hold you to that," he grinned, clearly amused as he followed her back out into the hall.

When Brooks returned it was clear that he was confused at the door being unlocked. He eyed the two teens, both of whom looked back at him innocently and while he was clearly suspicious at the way they were both slightly sweaty, he had no proof that they'd left the room and simply shrugged it off. Nari imagined that he thought they

couldn't hear it when he muttered '*teenagers*' to himself and she stifled a laugh. He let them go, waving them both off and they didn't waste much time before leaving. There was silence between the two of them until they exited the school doors and got to the parking lot.

"You need a ride?" Billy asked her, sounding somewhat hesitant.

She tried not to show her surprise, not so much at the offer but the way he said it. He'd sounded almost cautious about asking her such a simple thing.

"I'm good," she replied with a smile, gesturing to her skateboard.

He gave her a funny look and she laughed.

"What? We can't all afford a ride like yours, Hargrove."

"No, it's just..." he trailed off, letting out a short laugh. "You reminded me of my sister for second there."

"She must be a cool girl," Nari grinned.

He simply shrugged, the smile not leaving his face.

"Your loss," he gestured to his car.

When he saw that she wasn't going to take him up on the offer, he moved to his Camaro, throwing his stuff onto the passenger seat before getting in behind the wheel. His gaze met hers and she simply sent him a wave as the engine started, that loud rumble filling the air. She watched as he sped off, thinking back on the afternoon. She'd succeeded in not arguing with him, but the whole encounter left her mind reeling. When she had simply viewed Billy Hargrove as the asshole she wanted nothing to do with it was easy, because she at least had some idea of where they stood. However, now that she had actually managed to get along with him and – dare she say – had actually *enjoyed* his company, she didn't know what that meant. He was a lot more than just the hot headed asshole she'd always believed him to be, that much she now knew. So, where did they go from here? She wouldn't exactly call them friends, but she also wasn't too keen on going back to arguing every time they were in the same room. One thing was certain to Nari; time spent with Billy was never

dull.

## 5. 5 - Kiss Off

A/N: Well, I said I wouldn't be able to update this week and I honestly thought that would be the case. But I had some free time so here's the next chapter. I hope it's okay, I promise that things will pick up more in either the next chapter or the one after that.

---

*Situation gets rough, then I start to panic*

*It's not enough, it's just a habit*

*"Hey kid, you're sick,"*

*Well, darling this is it*

**- Kiss Off by the Violent Femmes (1983)**

---

"So how was detention?" Rachel asked, and even over the phone Nari could sense the suggestiveness in her tone.

She was sitting on her bed, twirling the cord of the phone around her finger as her homework sat untouched in front of her.

"Pretty boring," she brushed off, sensing where this was going.

"Really?" She heard Rachel say in disbelief. "So, you're trying to tell me that you didn't argue with Billy for once?"

"Yes, actually," Nari sighed. "We managed to get along."

"Oh my god, tell me everything!"

"There's nothing to tell. It's not like two people getting along is newsworthy, Rach."

"Lately whenever he's even mentioned – let alone in the same room – you act like it's the end of the world. So yeah, it's kind of a big deal if you managed to spend two hours locked in a room with him and didn't get into a fight."

"Well maybe I was sick of constantly arguing with him," Nari reasoned. "Turns out he's not so bad when he isn't walking around acting like he's better than everyone else."

"See! I told you he's okay once you get to know him... and you two have this fiery chemistry, just like Dean and I-"

"What's going on between you two, anyway?" Nari cut her off, taking the opportunity to change the topic. "Are you two a thing now?"

Rachel took the bait, quickly going on to gush about Dean and fill Nari in on their relationship. Nari smiled to herself, knowing that Rachel meant well but really just liked the idea of her and Billy being a thing because she and Dean were dating and Nari was Rachel's best friend, while Billy was Dean's. There was definitely no chemistry between them; they had managed to have a civil encounter *once* and Nari knew deep down that they hadn't had their last argument. Yet, for the moment she was content to be happy for Rachel and let her ramble about Dean, pushing her best friend's words about her and Billy to the back of her mind.

---

The sky was still dark, blanketing the streets of Santa Monica in darkness, with only the yellow-orange glow of the streetlamps illuminating them. Nari made her way quietly out of her house, careful not to wake her parents. She was hardly at home lately, always leaving at the crack of dawn to go to the beach and either spending time with her friends or working late into the night after school. A year ago her mother would have ensured that she was at home more often, but things were different now and Nari made the most of her newfound freedom. She stepped onto her skateboard once she was out in the street and immediately set off, having the road mostly to herself at that hour. She loved the rush of the wind in her hair and the speed with which she moved, weaving around cars and other obstacles like the board was simply an extension of her body. She headed for the beach, stopping close to the old P.O.P. where she saw Jay chatting with Vance, much to her surprise. Untucking her surfboard from under her arm, Nari placed it down on the sand, looking over to the blonde with a smile.

"Hey Van," she greeted.



"Nari!" He beamed. "We were just talking about the band. We're having our first jam session today, do you wanna come?"

"I wish I could, but I have to study with Billy after school. Speaking of, are you here by yourself?"

Before he could answer, she felt her hair being ruffled up from someone behind her, followed by a low chuckle.

"Aww you missed me, Miller? Rach might get jealous."

Turning around, she saw Dean behind her in his unzipped wetsuit, the top half hanging around his waist and exposing his chest. To say she was surprised would be an understatement, but she decided to just go with it. Looking at the playful glint in his eyes and the wicked grin adorning his lips, Nari thought – not for the first time – that sometimes he and Billy looked like brothers. Dean had a similar haircut to Billy, although his wavy dark brown locks were a stark contrast to Billy's golden-brown curls. Similarly, while they both had blue eyes, Dean's were more of an intense electric blue, while Billy's were a lighter and softer shade. Yet, there were moments, such as when they smiled a genuine grin, that they looked so alike. It threw her off to have Dean looking at her like that, bringing Billy immediately into her mind. Her silence only made Dean's smirk widen and she came back to reality too late, knowing that look meant nothing good.

"Or I guess you actually wanted to see Billy," he continued, teasingly. "Sorry to disappoint."

"In his dreams," Nari rolled her eyes.

"C'mon, man, leave her alone," Vance cut in. "Where is Billy, anyway?"

"I don't know, I'm not his mother," Dean shrugged. "Guess he's not coming. Does it matter?"

Nari turned back around just in time to see Vance let out a sigh, as Jay started heading to the water. She quickly picked up her surfboard and followed him, happy with the size of the waves. The sun was

starting to peak out over the horizon, causing the sky to light up with warm colours. Vance and Dean followed along behind them and Nari figured they planned to tag along that morning. She jumped onto her board as soon as she was deep enough in the surf and paddled out. Nari had skated for longer than she had surfed, but she enjoyed the latter far more. There was something exhilarating about moving along with the wave, the salty air in your hair and the way the water made your skin feel fresh and rejuvenated afterwards. Nari never felt so free as she did in the surf, losing herself in the ocean and not forgetting everything else for the moment. She caught a few waves, ignoring the others around her for the time being. It was only when she sat back down on her board, watching Jay take on one of the waves that she acknowledged the other two boys again.

"Think we could ever get Rach to come out here?" Dean asked her.

"I hate to break it to you," Nari laughed. "But it's a miracle she even gets up in time for school. There's no way she'd get up when it's still dark."

"Hey, I can think of a few ways *I* might be able to persuade her," he winked.

"Gross," she crinkled up her nose in disgust, letting out a laugh.

"When did you start surfing, Nari?" Vance joined their conversation.

"Jay's dad started teaching me when I was about ten," she replied. "I'd already been skating practically since I could walk, so I pretty much instantly loved it."

Dean move to paddle back out and catch another wave, so she turned her full attention towards Vance.

"You've surfed since you were really little, right?" She asked him. "I can't remember a time I haven't seen you out here."

"Yeah," he replied, that ever-present smile never faltering. "Been surfing and drumming ever since I can remember. You really can't make it this afternoon?"

"Trust me, I'd definitely rather be there than forcing Billy to work on

this assignment, but I'm already scared of failing."

"You never used to care that much about your grades," he pointed out.

"Yeah, but bad grades don't really get you far," she shrugged, looking away.

"Well, I guess I'll let it slide this time," he spoke gently, coaxing her to look back up at him. "If you promise to come next time, deal?"

She smiled, unable to help herself.

"Deal," she agreed with a soft laugh.

She had always liked Vance and gotten along with him. He had an aura about him that was both uplifting and calming. His positive, carefree nature made him instantly likeable and she was glad that he'd joined Jay's band. Turning her attention to her oldest friend, she saw that he was looking back at her, observing her and Vance with an odd expression. It was almost like he knew something she didn't, smiling at her in a way that suggested something she couldn't quite figure out. She eventually brushed it off, deciding that there were certain things about boys she would never understand. Instead she returned her attention to the surf, not wasting anymore thoughts on the guys surrounding her.

---

"Are you gonna come and see Vance play this afternoon?" Rachel asked as she and Nari walked through the school hallways.

"Don't remind me," Nari groaned. "I'd rather be doing that than staying back with Hargrove. At this rate I'll have to hold a gun to his head to get any contribution from him."

"This is your chance," Rachel grinned like the cat who got the canary. "You two can get closer and then you can make your move."

Nari sighed, but before she could shut her best friend down, she was cut off.

"You might want to get a move on though, since it looks like Kelsey

McCrane is pretty persistent..."

Rolling her eyes, Nari followed Rachel's gaze to find Kelsey talking to Billy. She looked upset about something, pouting and whining at him. Billy, however, just looked like he was becoming increasingly pissed off and Nari couldn't help but pity the other girl. She watched as Kelsey jumped when he suddenly snapped at her, the girl quickly shrinking back with tears beginning to well up in her eyes. Nari sighed when he stormed off and was already regretting it when she took a step to follow after him, leaving Rachel dumfounded behind her. She caught up to him outside the school building, reaching out to grab his arm.

"Billy," she spoke softly.

He stopped and slowly turned around and Nari noted that she had definitely seen him a lot angrier and allowed herself to be relieved at that.

"Are you okay?" She asked, trying not to make his temper worse.

"I'm fine," he gritted out, not convincing in the least.

"You didn't have to snap at her," she chided him lightly. "You really need to learn to control that temper of yours."

She had said it as a joke, trying to get him to lighten up, but it seemed she still had a lot to learn about Billy Hargrove.

"The last time I checked, it wasn't any of your business, Miller," he seethed.

"Maybe not," she allowed. "But I just saw how angry you looked, and I wanted to—"

"You wanted to what?" He snapped, cutting her off. "We're not friends, Miller. Just because I dragged your ass through the mud in a game of ball doesn't mean we're gonna start braiding each other's hair and trading friendship bracelets. So, just *fuck off*, would you?"

She stared at him in shock for a moment before the anger started to bubble up inside of her. Before she said something that she would no

doubt later regret, Nari turned around and gave him exactly what he wanted, heading back towards the school building and leaving him to be alone. Her body seemed to be shaking with repressed anger as she walked, and she didn't pay her surroundings much mind until she bumped right into someone. She felt them grab her arms, steadying her and she looked up to see Dean smiling sympathetically down at her. Looking behind him, she saw Rachel who was looking towards the direction she had left Billy standing in with wide eyes.

"It's better to just leave him alone when he's like that," Dean advised her.

"So I've discovered," she mumbled.

"Rach said you have a free period?" He asked, slinging a friendly arm around her shoulder and leading her over to the girl in question.

"Yeah," she confirmed.

"C'mon then," he smiled. "We're gonna grab some food. Van's treat."

She nodded her head, agreeing to the offer and Rachel gave her a hesitant smile. Nari was thankful that her best friend at least didn't say one word about Billy the whole time they were out.

---

Billy felt a lot calmer by the time school was out for the day, the irritating bitch that was Kelsey McCrane shoved to the back of his mind by that point. When he got to the school's amphitheatre, he saw Nari waiting for him and already looking pissed off before he'd even had a chance to open his mouth. He couldn't help but be amused and as soon as she spotted him, she didn't waste a second before she was setting on him.

"I've been waiting here for fifteen minutes!" She complained. "I have better things to do than wait around for you all afternoon. I swear to God, if you had your tongue down some girls throat, I will—"

His amusement peaked when Max stepped out from behind him, effectively shutting her up. Max already looked bored out of her mind and hobbled over to the concrete steps of the amphitheatre, her

crutches supporting her. Nari's eyes followed the girl, clearly taking in her leg that was covered in a cast.

"Can we get this over with?" He brought her attention back to him.

"Right," she said, noticeably calmer now as she went over to her schoolbag, pulling out some paper. "I wrote you a summary of the play. Can you please read through it so we can actually start making some progress?"

She was being sickeningly sweet, but Billy didn't have any interest in finding out why. All he wanted was a passing grade to keep his dad off his back. Sitting down on the cold concrete steps, he lit up a cigarette and tried to focus on the neatly scrawled words on the page. He was already losing interest one sentence in, so when he heard Nari strike up a conversation with Max he tuned into whatever distraction he could get.

"You're Billy's sister?" She asked.

"Yeah, I'm Max."

Max was a little reserved, but if he knew one thing about Nari it was how persistent she could be.

"How'd you break your leg?" She asked the younger girl.

"Skateboarding," was her short answer.

"I skate too," Nari smiled, gesturing to her board.

He watched as Max's eyes lit up slightly and in any other situation Billy would have drowned them out already. Yet, when his choices were listening to the two girls talking about skateboarding instead of reading about the ancient Greek tragedy, he found the former a lot more interesting. He observed as Max talked to Nari animatedly, going into details about whatever trick she'd been attempting when she'd broken her leg. He barely managed to suppress his scoff at how blasé she sounded about the whole thing now, considering she'd been crying a river from the pain when it happened. His attention eventually shifted to Nari, studying her for a moment. She was fairly thin, but she had curves in all the places that mattered, and her dyed

golden hair made her glow, especially on the rare occasion he'd seen her smile. But she wasn't the type he'd ever go for. There was just something about her that wasn't like the girls he went after – probably the fact that she never knew when to keep her mouth shut. That's why he couldn't understand the way Vance was crushing on her like a lovesick puppy. The guy could have any girl, but he was completely caught up in her. Billy knew Vance didn't think anyone knew, but he wasn't an idiot, and everyone could see how he felt except for Nari herself.

"No way!" Max exclaimed, bringing Billy's attention back to her.

Her eyes were wide, and the faintest smile tilted up her lips. "You met Peggy Oki!?"

"Yeah," Nari laughed. "She was really cool. Signed my skateboard and everything. I haven't used that one ever since. I don't want anything to happen to it."

"That's so cool..." Max breathed out.

Nari laughed before her gaze moved over to Billy.

"You done?" She asked him.

"Yeah," he lied, not bothered enough to read through it.

"Okay, so," she started to ramble on about her plans for the presentation and Billy quickly got lost, not following a single thing she was saying.

She eventually caught on, sighing as she gave him an exasperated look.

"Really, Hargrove?" She groaned. "I even dumbed it down for you and it's *still* too much?"

Before he could snap a retort back at her, Max was cutting in.

"Why don't you just talk about how the message of the story still has significance today?"

Turning to look at her, Billy saw that Max had taken Nari's notes and read through them.

"Yeah, that's what I was thinking too!" Nari beamed.

She started telling her ideas to Max and while the girl looked a little lost at times as well, she gave occasional input and Billy was content to sit back and let them do the work for him; he couldn't care less as long as he passed. Eventually, Nari seemed content enough to call it a day and he was relieved.

"We can give you a ride," Max told Nari as the older girl was packing her stuff back into her school bag. "Right, Billy?"

"I'm okay," Nari declined with a smile before he could say anything. "Thanks for the offer though."

He watched as she ruffled up Max's hair playfully.

"See ya, grommet," she grinned. "Maybe one day we can skate together, once that leg is healed."

"Hopefully," Max smiled back at her.

Nari gave him a short wave before she skated off and he quickly headed for the parking lot, wanting to drop Max off so he could go out for the night. When they got into his Camaro, Max seemed to be bubbling with energy, quickly getting on his nerves.

"She's cool," she said eventually. "Are you two dating?"

He let out a laugh, finding the idea more than just a little amusing.

"No."

"Good," she grinned, quickly making his own smile fade. "She's way out of your league."

For a moment he was thrown off by her comment before he brushed it off, because what would a kid like her know? He turned up the volume and let his mind become consumed by Judas Priest rather than Max's laughs or thoughts of the blonde girl with the fiery temper



to match his own.

---

**A/N:** I just want to clarify that I don't think Billy is dumb and I hope the writing doesn't make it come across that way. I see him more as the type where he's disinterested and can't be bothered. Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed the chapter! As always, any feedback is greatly appreciated.

## 6. 6 - Stranglehold

A/N:

I haven't been well since the weekend, as I've been sick with a virus. If this chapter isn't the best, I apologise and I'll likely revisit it later to edit and improve it. As always thank you to those who have left feedback, it's always greatly appreciated and keeps me motivated.

---

*The road I cruise is a bitch now, baby*

*You know you can't turn me 'round*

*And if a house gets in my way, baby*

*You know I'll burn it down*

- Stranglehold by Ted Nugent (1975)

---

The late October weather was still fairly warm in L.A. and Nari's favourite holiday had arrived. Although her trick-or-treating days were now far behind her, there was always some kind of big Halloween party that kept the spirit alive. This year it was Vance hosting the biggest party, which was sure to bring in a pretty mixed crowd since she didn't know of a single person he didn't get along with. She had decided to dress up as a witch for the party, wearing a black velvet cocktail dress with a plunging neckline that hugged her curves and reached mid-thigh. Around her shoulders was a flowing black velvet cape and she had decided to wear a long black wig, which was far closer to her natural hair colour than the blonde locks she currently had. Atop the wig sat a classic black witches hat, with some black chiffon hanging from the back of it, almost like a veil. Her makeup was minimal, but the red lipstick she wore stood out from the all black outfit. The look was very different to what she normally wore, but that was the point. When she was finished getting ready, she stepped out of the bathroom at Jay's house and went into his bedroom, stepping into a haze of smoke as she did so. She spotted him lounging on his bed and he looked up once he noticed her.

"Wow," he let out a low whistle. "You look great."

He handed her the blunt he'd been smoking and she eyed him up and down as she toked on it.

"Wish I could say the same for you," she joked. "Where's your costume?"

He reached over to his dresser, grabbing a pair of aviator sunglasses and putting them on, before stretching his arms out beside him, as though to say, *ta-da!* She rolled her eyes at him, then noticing that he was wearing leather pants as well.

"Really, Jay? You're going as Jim Morrison again?"

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it," he shrugged.

"Whatever," she laughed. "Come on, let's go."

It didn't take long before they were leaving his house and it was only a short walk to Vance's house. She spotted a familiar face turning up at the same time and called out to her. It was Jodi, holding a wooden cane in one hand and wearing a lilac leotard paired with a white skirt, white stockings and pale blue legwarmers.

"Hey," Jodi grinned when they approached her.

"What's your costume?" Nari asked, knowing it seemed familiar but not able to figure it out completely.

To her surprise, Jodi cleared her throat before leaning closer to her.

"You've got big dreams, you want fame," Jodi recited, beginning to tap her cane against the ground and Nari grinned as it suddenly dawned on her. "Well fame costs. And right here is where you start paying – in sweat!"

"I would have figured that out of all of them, you'd go as Coco," Nari laughed. "You look a lot like her actually."

"Miss Grant is more recognisable as a costume," Jodi shrugged.

Nari loved the character of Lydia Grant but wasn't sure that anyone at this party watched *Fame* on Thursday nights. Therefore, she doubted anyone would understand Jodi's outfit. Nonetheless, she thought it was an interesting costume idea. They went inside, Jodi and Jay already striking up a conversation and leaving Nari to smoke the new joint Jay had lit up on the way over. She spotted Rachel and Dean pretty quickly after going inside and had to chuckle at their costume choice. Dean was dressed as Han Solo, in the classic outfit associated with the character. To compliment him, Rachel had dressed up as Princess Leia, however rather than going for the iconic white dress and cinnamon buns, she wore Leia's slave outfit from the most recent film. Nari had to admit that her best friend certainly pulled off the outfit and the two looked amazing. Rachel gave her a big hug when she saw her and as she pulled away, she quickly stole the joint from Nari's fingers, taking it for herself.

"You look amazing," Rachel gushed and Nari noticed she was wearing the new lipstick she'd made for her.

"Thanks, so do you guys."

"Hey, Miller," Dean greeted. "You want a drink?"

"Sure," she smiled at him.

While Dean went over to the keg to grab her some beer, the two best friends chatted together.

"Van was looking for you earlier," Rachel told her, holding back a laugh. "Wait until you see his costume."

"Oh God, how bad is it?"

"It's not so much bad as it is... *extreme*," Rachel bursted into giggles.

"Is Hargrove here?" Nari changed the topic.

"Yeah," Rachel gave her an odd look but seemed smart enough not to make any comments. "He's around here somewhere. Maybe just try and avoid him?"

"I'm a big girl, Rach. I can handle him."

Before Rachel could reply Dean was back, handing them both plastic red cups filled with beer. The three soon moved through the crowd, heading towards the back yard as Van Halen's *Hang 'Em High* blared through the speakers. She saw a tub of water filled with apples and a small crowd was gathered around it as a guy dunked his head to try and bite one of the apples. When he was successful and lifted his head up with the apple in his mouth, Nari couldn't help but laugh.

"Oh my God, it's not..."

Rachel followed her gaze, also letting out a giggle. Vance's long blonde hair fell around his bare shoulders, as his chest was mostly exposed, only covered by straps of studded leather pulled together in a design reminiscent of a double draw shoulder gun holster, yet with a shoulder pad on the left. His red and black leather pants were also studded, and bands of leather also adorned his arms. He had the hair to pull off his costume choice of Vince Neil, but it was an odd choice. Mötley Crüe may have dominated the stage in their crazy, *Road Warrior* inspired outfits, but Vance just looked like an absolute goofball. He spotted her, the apple dropping from his mouth and to the ground as he made his way over to her. Funnily enough, Rachel and Dean chose that moment to walk off, leaving Nari alone.

"Nari, you came!" He beamed, picking her up and spinning her around as his arms wrapped around her in a tight hug.

"Hey Van," she laughed.

He set her down, stepping back slightly but keeping a grip on her arms.

"You look gorgeous," he complimented her with a sweet grin.

"Thanks... you, uh, look interesting."

"Wrong hair colour for Tommy," was all he said with a shrug, earning another laugh from her. "Can I get you anything? A drink or...?"

"I'm good," she held up her drink.

It fell silent between the two and for the first time, Nari felt a little awkward in Vance's presence. It looked like he wanted to say

something but was holding back. She wasn't really sure what to say and didn't want to push him into revealing whatever was on his mind. So, the two stood in awkward silence, Nari lifting her drink to her lips so she had *something* to do. A loud cheer thankfully grabbed their attention after a few moments, the two of them turning to the source of the noise. A girl Nari didn't recognise had gotten up on top of the outdoor table and was peeling off her shirt. The cheers escalated when she successfully removed her top, her large, bare breasts bouncing freely as she threw the garment away. Nari and Vance glanced back at each other before simultaneously bursting into laughter. As her laughs died down, she took another swig of her drink, quickly finishing it.

"On second thoughts, I might take you up on that offer for a drink."

He smiled, taking her hand (much to her surprise) and leading her through the crowd once again. When they reached the kitchen, she propped herself up on the counter as Vance dug through the cupboards.

"How about a cocktail?" He suggested, pulling out a blender.

"Wow, I didn't know you were so talented," she teased.

He just winked at her in response before moving over to the fridge and grabbing whatever ingredients he needed.

"So what's this called, then?" She asked playfully as he began to put what very much looked like a random assortment of fruits and juice with *a lot* of vodka into the blender.

"Uhh..." he trailed off. "Fruit Surprise?"

"That's absolutely awful, Van," she giggled hysterically. "You're not even trying."

"Okay, I guess you can do better, then?"

She held up her hands in mock surrender and when he started up the blender, she watched him with an amused smile. Once it was all blended up, he handed her a suspicious looking concoction and she raised an eyebrow at him in response.

"Come on," he coaxed. "At least try it."

She took a tentative sip before her features smoothed out and she relaxed.

"It's not bad, actually," she shrugged, earning a grin from him.

He grabbed a cup for himself, taking a big sip before coughing violently.

"Fuck," he wheezed out. "That's disgusting."

She gave him a mischievous smirk and he moved closer to her, shaking his head.

"You've got a pretty good game face, I'll give you that."

Her smirk became a wide grin and the two stared at each other for a moment. Nari became aware of the awkward atmosphere settling over the two once again as they both ran out of things to say.

"Nari..." he eventually said, but from the look in his eyes she wasn't sure if she was glad that he broke the silence. "There's something I wanted to--"

"Hey, Van!" Someone yelled from across the room.

She watched as he reluctantly tore his gaze away from her, before his eyes widened.

"What the fuck?" He breathed out.

She followed his gaze, only for her own eyes to widen in shock. One of the cushions from his couch had been lit on fire and Vance quickly left the kitchen, walking over to put it out. She shook her head in amusement, turning back around and looking down at the 'cocktail' he had made her. She wondered what he had been about to say, but deep down she already knew. As much as she liked Vance, it wasn't in *that* way and the idea of what he might have been about to ask her made her feel uncomfortable.

"Lighten up, Miller," a voice startled her from her thoughts. "Jesus,

you look like someone just died."

Looking up, she saw none other than Billy Hargrove and she let out a huff of annoyance. He moved over to the counter where she was perched, eyeing the blender full of Vance's horrible drink. She watched with amusement as he poured himself a cup of it, before lifting up the cup to her.

"Hey, we should toast our achievement today," he suggested, voice dripping with sarcasm. "We managed to get through that presentation without killing each other."

She thought back to school earlier that day and how they had, in fact, managed to get through their presentation on *Oedipus* without a hitch. She, for one, was just glad it was over and that she would no longer have to feel like she would need to hold a gun to his head just to force him to study. Bringing her attention back to the present, she watched as he swigged back the drink, downing it in one go. To her disappointment, he only grimaced, not paying it much mind.

"You make that?" He asked her.

"No way," she laughed, downing the rest of hers as well. "And if you're going to toast anyone it should be Max and I, since we did all the work."

"What Baudelaire doesn't know won't hurt her," he shrugged.

"Is that your costume, by the way?" She asked him with a raised brow, eyeing his regular clothes.

"I'm not seven," he retorted.

"You're such a spoil sport," she teased. "Besides, you definitely wouldn't see a kid in Rach's costume."

"You could take some pointers from her," he didn't miss a beat, eyeing her up and down.

"Come on. You don't like my costume?"

She hopped off the counter, doing a little twirl for him, which caused



her cape to flare out around her in the process. She stumbled a little when she stopped, feeling a little dizzy after drinking Vance's cocktail. It might have tasted awful, but it was pretty strong. She was surprised when Billy caught her, steadying her on her feet.

"I'm just saying it's a little boring," he replied, letting his hands drop from her arms.

"You're one to talk," she slapped his upper arm playfully. "Least you could've done is put a shirt on."

She poked his bare chest and, in the process, realised she was definitely already tipsy.

"How much of that shit did you drink?" He asked, definitely noticing.

"Just the one," she shrugged.

"Should've known you'd be a lightweight," he shook his head with a small smile as she looked innocently back up at him.

"There you are!" A new voice cut in. "I've been waiting for *ages*!"

Nari looked to the entrance of the kitchen to see a girl pouting at Billy. His attention was immediately captured by the busty blonde and Nari rolled her eyes with a laugh, expecting nothing less. He opened the fridge, finding some bottles of beer, before slinging his arm around the girl and leading her out of the kitchen. Nari grabbed herself another cup of Vance's disastrous drink, figuring that it would at least get her drunk quickly. She moved back out into the crowded living room, weaving through the crowd as Mötley Crüe's *Too Fast For Love* began playing. She felt a hand grab her wrist and turned to see Rachel grinning at her.

"C'mon, let's dance," her best friend pulled her into a more open space.

Nari smiled back at her, quickly downing the drink once again and immediately feeling it hit her. The two began to dance together, bodies close and hips moving rhythmically to the music. It wasn't the kind of song she normally danced to, but they made it work and she quickly became lost in the beat, singing along to the lyrics and

ignoring all the other people in the room. When she felt hands grip her waist, she initially thought it was Rachel, but when the overwhelming smell of cigarettes invaded her senses she quickly tensed up.

"Don't stop on my account," the last voice she wanted to hear spoke into her ear.

She stumbled away from him, but he managed to grab her wrist in a vice like grip, spinning her back around to face him. Across from her was Johnny Slater, who she hadn't seen since Dean's party. He was a couple of grades above them, so she didn't see him much at school, but he still sometimes hung around Billy's group of friends. Even back when she despised Billy, she would've taken him over Slater any day. He was tall and skinny with greasy black hair and there was something in his gaze whenever he looked at her that made her skin crawl. He pulled her closer to him and her heart raced in her chest as she tried to remain calm.

"What do you say," he leant down, speaking into her ear and making her shiver in disgust. "We go somewhere more... private. I've always wondered what'd it be like fucking a gook."

Her eyes narrowed in anger at the slur and she pulled back enough to glare at him.

"Let her go, Slater," she heard Rachel from behind her.

"Fuck off, Taylor," he spat without looking away from Nari.

"I'm not going anywhere with you," Nari seethed, giving him a chance to let her go. "So, get your disgusting hands off me."

His grip only tightened on her wrist. "You don't get a choice."

Her anger had reached its breaking point and she swiftly lifted up her knee, getting him right in the balls. It was enough to make him let go and she lifted up her arms to push him roughly to the ground.

"Take a fucking hint, you jackass," she fumed at him.

He moved to get up from the ground and make another move

towards her, when suddenly she was gently pushed back as another figure stood in front of her. The familiar long blonde hair was all it took for her to know it was Vance.

"You heard her," he said to Slater, sounding like he was barely controlling his own anger. "Get the fuck out."

Vance's physique was a lot bigger than Slater's, so after a moment he picked his battles and left. Vance watched until he was out of sight, before turning back to Nari, the rage in his gaze being replaced with concern. He gently took hold of her hand and she let him lead her out of the room and into the bathroom. On the way she caught sight of Billy and his girl of the night, the former staring at her with an unreadable expression. Once they were in the bathroom, she sat down on the edge of the tub, taking deep breaths to calm herself down. She could've handled herself, but she was glad for Vance stepping in, nonetheless.

"Are you okay?" He asked her softly, to which she simply nodded.

He gently took hold of her wrist, which Slater had held in his tight grip, noticing how red it was.

"I should put some ice on it," he told her, already moving back to the door.

"It's okay," she stopped him, feeling dizzy. "I'll be fine."

He moved to sit next to her, his shoulders slumping in defeat as he clearly wanted to help her but didn't know how.

"I could kill him," he muttered.

"It could've been worse," she pointed out, her words slightly slurred. "I'm more angry than anything. I can't stand that slimy asshole."

"Well you were pretty badass, knocking him down like that. I'm sorry I didn't get there sooner."

"Not your fault," she shrugged.

"Are you sure you're okay?" He asked again.

"Yeah, Van," she sighed. "I just want another drink."

"Okay," he stood up, before holding his hand out to her.

She took it and he helped her up, before leading her back out to the living room.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll get you another drink and some ice for your wrist. I'll be right back, okay?"

She nodded and he disappeared back into the crowd. The more the music blared around her and the more she looked at the other people in the crowd around her, the more she realised she just wanted to leave. Her mood had been killed, so she headed towards the door, picking up a half-finished drink on the way and downing it, letting the alcohol burn down her throat. The fresh air was soothing when it hit her and she stumbled down the driveway, the more she walked, the more she realised how much the alcohol was affecting her. Eventually, she tripped on her cape, almost falling to the ground, but strong arms were there to catch her. She heard a sigh, as she was steadied back onto her feet.

"You owe me, Miller."

It was Billy and she found herself slumping back into his hold, making him grunt from the unexpected extra weight.

"You're heavier than you look," he laughed softly. "Come on."

He began leading her down the driveway and she followed willingly until his blue Camaro came into view.

"Ani, ani," she panicked. "'M not getting in that."

"Yes you are."

"Nope."

"Why not?" He let out another sigh.

"Because..." She trailed off as a hiccup escaped her lips. "Um... you've been drinking too."

"I'm fine," he tried to reason with her. "Get in the car, I'm taking you home."

"I don't want to go home," she protested sulkily.

If she had been sober, she would've noticed how quickly he was losing his patience and wondered why he was trying so hard to stay calm. Yet, in her inebriated state, she merely swayed on the spot, looking at him in what she thought was defiance, but in reality, came across like a petulant child.

"Fine," he sighed once again.

She smiled, turning around to continue her walk, once again tripping on her cape. She managed to steady herself without his help that time and began walking down the street. It took her a while to realise that there was the sound of footsteps coming from beside her, but once she did notice, she looked to find Billy walking with her.

"You're following me," she observed.

"Good job, genius," he drawled out mockingly.

"Where are we going?" She asked.

He let out a scoff, shaking his head. "Where do you want to go?"

"Hmm," she considered it for a moment, before perking up. "Are you hungry?"

"I could eat," he shrugged, clearly not bothered either way.

"Let's go to Zucky's!" She beamed.

"The food is shit there," he groaned.

"Come on, it's the only place open now."

"Okay," he reluctantly agreed, like a parent giving in to a child.

She grinned, grabbing his hand and attempting to skip off down the street. She didn't notice the way he tensed up at the contact, as her

movements caused her to trip once again.

"Jesus Christ," he sighed, stopping her and spinning her around to face him. "You're gonna break your neck in this fucking thing."

Her head was spinning from the sudden movement, so she stared at him in a daze. He untied the bow from around her neck, before removing the cape from around her shoulders, causing her to frown.

"Now I'm cold," she pouted, looking up at him with doe-like eyes.

He rolled his own eyes, before taking off his leather jacket and handing it to her. She stared at him for a moment before smiling and pulling on the jacket. It was enormous on her but kept her nice and warm.

"Okay, let's go," she proclaimed, once again leading the way.

It didn't take too long before they got there, and she plopped herself down in one of the booths, Billy following a moment later. She looked around the familiar deli, the tangerine vinyl-upholstered seats sticking out in contrast to the white tiled floor. When she turned to look at Billy, she noticed that he was rubbing his arms as though he was cold but trying very hard not to show it. Chuckling at his stubbornness, she moved out of her side of the booth and slid in beside him. He stared at her, silently wondering what she was doing, and she reached out to grab her cape, wrapping it around his shoulders before flashing him a wide grin. His expression was blank as he looked back at her and the two stared at each other for a moment, as the smile fell from her lips and they formed an 'o' shape instead.

"You're adorable, sweetheart," he teased her softly, leaving her stunned until a second later he reached out to pinch her cheek.

"Ow," she whined, pouting again.

He let go of her cheek with another soft laugh and she rubbed the sore skin with a frown at him.

"What did you say?" She asked, not sure she'd heard him right.

"Nothing," he brushed it off, leaning back against the seat and wrapping the cape tighter around him.

"It's your own fault you're cold," she told him stubbornly as she observed him. "Don't you own any shirts?"

"No other girls ever complained," he replied, amusement in his tone.

She huffed, staring at him for a moment before she turned away from him, looking around the deli again. A comfortable silence fell over the two of them for a while and she was content to sit there next to him, her head no longer swimming as she listened to *Hello, It's Me* play on the radio, bringing back a memory from what now felt like a lifetime ago.

"Hey, Billy?" She eventually broke the silence, feeling a little more sober.

"Yeah?"

"This song was playing that night too," she told him. "Do you remember?"

"What night?"

"The first time you came in here," she laughed softly. "When we had that argument."

"You mean, when you kept harassing me."

"Whatever," she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Yeah, I remember," he said eventually, surprising her.

Silence fell over them again until someone finally decided to show up at their table and serve them. Looking up, she saw that it was Eiza, giving her a knowing smile. She wasn't surprised to see her favourite colleague, since the girl practically lived at Zucky's she was there so much.

"What can I get for you?" She asked in her usually perky manner, but Nari still noticed that she looked a little pale.

Billy quickly ordered something and Nari eventually followed suit. Before leaving, Eiza gave her a look, as though to say *we'll talk about this later*. Silence fell between them once again until Nari decided to ask him another question.

"Billy?"

"Yeah?"

"Why'd you follow me out of the party?" She was brimming with curiosity.

"I didn't. I was already leaving when I saw you."

"Yeah right," she scoffed. "You left that girl behind?"

"Yeah, she drank too much and once she started hurling, I bailed pretty quick."

"Eww," she screwed up her nose in distaste.

She heard him laugh and it fell silent between them again for a moment, as she got lost in her thoughts again.

"Okay, why'd you follow me down here then?"

"Let it go, Miller," he groaned.

She straightened up energetically, looking over at him with a grin.

"Just admit it," she poked him in the side. "Underneath that tough exterior, you've got a tiny *fragment* of a heart."

He laughed again, shaking his head in amusement. Their food didn't take long and neither of them minded eating in relative silence. Nari felt herself sobering up as she filled up on the food and with that, she grew tired. Once they finished eating, she was quick to head to the counter where Eiza stood.

"I guess you two are getting along better," Eiza observed, giving her a knowing smile.



"Yeah, I took your advice."

It had been a while since she had seen her colleague, and she noticed again how pale she looked. It made sense though, as she worked far too much. Still, Nari was concerned about her.

"Are you feeling okay?" She asked.

"I'm fine, just tired," Eiza assured her, before gesturing to Billy. "I'm glad you gave him a chance."

Nari considered her words for a moment, before giving her a smile back.

"Me too."

She had definitely seen more than one new side to Billy since spending detention together and most of the time she enjoyed being around him. Especially that night, she had seen a new side to him. He'd almost seemed concerned for her wellbeing, not leaving her to walk the streets alone, drunk and stupid. She knew that there was a lot about Billy she still didn't know.

"Don't worry about the bill, of course," Eiza spoke again, breaking through her thoughts.

"Thanks," Nari gave her a weary smile.

"Go home, you look exhausted."

Nari nodded, turning to head back to Billy. She took off his jacket, handing it to him before gently lifting her cape from his shoulders, only realising at that moment that she should've just done that in the first place. He gave her a look when she fastened her cape back around her shoulders, to which she simply shrugged.

"I feel a lot better now," she assured him.

That seemed to be a good enough answer for him and the two headed out of the deli.

"You don't have to walk me home," she told him once they were out

in the street.

"It's fine," was all he said.

Sighing, she gave in and led the way. Nari was too tired to strike up a conversation with him, but she was almost hyperaware of his presence next to her as they walked. Even though he smoked, he didn't reek of cigarettes like Slater did. Instead, he smelt of a subtle, musky cologne that she had to admit she liked. His body also radiated heat, which was something she found comforting. Every now and then, their arms would brush against each other, yet neither of them acknowledged it. Internally, though, Nari felt a spark at the contact, her emotions running rampant within her. She simply brushed it off, blaming it on the alcohol, breathing out a sigh of relief when they finally reached her house. She came to a stop, turning to face him, his big, round blue eyes looking back down at her. He always looked so calm and composed – unless he was pissed off. He never seemed nervous or embarrassed or uncertain. She envied him in a way, knowing that she could never hide her own emotions. His gaze seemed to burn through her in that moment and she wasn't sure what spurred her on, but before she knew it, she was reaching up on the tips of her toes and leaning towards him. Her lips made contact with his skin, pressing a kiss to his cheek.

"Thank you, Billy," she told him softly, her hand on his chest, steadying her.

When she pulled back, her feet falling flat on the ground, she noticed his tense jaw and how his gaze had hardened. She immediately regretted the action and before he could say anything or notice how humiliated she had suddenly become, she turned on her heel and headed inside, leaving him standing on the sidewalk as she moved quietly through her house.

---

Nari groaned as a loud ringing suddenly sounded through the air, waking her up. Squinting at the sunlight filtering in through the window, she looked over to her bedside table, realising that the noise was coming from the phone. She leant over to pick it up, twirling the cord around her finger out of habit.

"Hello?"

"Nari?" Rachel's voice filtered through. "Oh good, Billy got you home okay then."

"What?" She asked, still disoriented.

"He came up to me at the party and said to let Van know you'd left and that he was going to make sure you got home okay."

"Billy did?" She mumbled sleepily.

The memories slowly started coming back and she groaned in embarrassment, remembering how she had acted.

"Yeah, Van was really worried about you after what that pig Slater did. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," she groaned out.

"Sounds like a pretty bad hangover," Rachel laughed softly.

"Yeah," Nari sighed out. "I'll talk to you later, okay?"

"Okay, get some rest," Rachel agreed before hanging up.

Nari pulled a pillow over her head, wanting to die from the humiliation. The night was already a disaster and then she had to go and kiss him. Sure, it was only on the cheek, but that was bad enough. What had she been thinking? She tried to push it out of her mind, only for another memory to come to mind. She suddenly threw the pillow covering her face across to the other side of the room.

"He told me some bullshit story about that girl throwing up," she voiced aloud, remembering his answer when she asked him why he followed her out of the party.

From what Rachel told her, that wasn't the case at all. He had left the girl behind just to make sure she got home safe and that only perplexed her even more. No matter what, the more she got to know Billy, the more confused she became and maybe – just maybe – he had more than just a *fragment* of a heart.